



November 3, 2021

COVID-19 FAQ #3 – 2021-2022

In this COVID-19 FAQ, you will find information on: personal protective equipment (PPE); health and safety; and Employment Insurance (EI).

Frequently Asked Questions

I've heard that some boards are allowing staff to bring their own PPE to work. Can I do that too?

Some boards have decided to allow staff to wear their own superior PPE (masks). If your board has made this decision, you may wish to consider your options. N95 masks are superior to the current masks provided to workers by school boards, even without being fit-tested.

Members present in a room when an aerosol-generating medical procedure (e.g., the suctioning of a tracheotomy) is being conducted should be wearing fit-tested N95 masks. This affects very few ETFO members, but if you think you are in this situation and you haven't been given an N95 mask, contact your local office immediately.

ETFO has also recommended that members should be wearing fit-tested N95s when working with students who are unable to wear masks, or for whom masks aren't required (e.g., some special education programs, Kindergarten in some boards), but this is not happening consistently around the province. If you are in this situation, speak to your supervisor, your health and safety rep, and your local office, until your concerns are addressed.

As always, ETFO members who feel that they are not safe in the workplace should be aware of their [right to refuse](#) unsafe work.

Who can I contact if I would like to wear superior PPE?

If you would like to wear a superior mask due to personal circumstances, and your board has not taken action to permit N95 masks or other superior PPE, you can speak with your local ETFO office and/or the health and safety representative for advice on how to address this.

If you require an N95 mask as a medical accommodation, speak to your healthcare provider and go through your school board's accommodation process. Contact your local office if you need their support.

What should I consider when acquiring my own superior PPE?

When acquiring your own PPE, please note:

- Not all masks have been demonstrated to be effective or meet standards. Make sure that yours is on the [Health Canada approved PPE list](#) OR is NIOSH-certified OR is ASTM Level 2 or higher; and
- Masks that have exhalation valves protect the wearer, but not the people around them. They are not equivalent or superior to ASTM Level 2 and should not be permitted in schools.

If your employer insists that you wear the PPE they provide in addition to your own superior PPE, ensure having two layers of filtration doesn't make breathing difficult.

If your employer does not permit superior PPE, consider other ways to [improve your mask's function](#).

How do power outages affect our safety at school?

Functioning ventilation systems are important tools to keep everyone safe. They help to ensure the air in a room is replaced with fresh air and/or filtered air so that aerosols aren't allowed to build up. Because mechanical ventilation systems and free-standing air cleaners (e.g., HEPA units) need power, power outages result in the loss of important sources of protection.

No one should be going to a building where it is known that there will be no ventilation for part or all of the day. Boards and schools should have a policy for how to address power outages. The plan can range from opening windows to closing schools, depending on the situation and whether the outage is planned or unexpected. Ask your administrator what the plan is at your school.

If you don't get answers to your questions from your administrator, speak to your health and safety representative to find out if this has been addressed at the Joint Health and Safety Committee. You may need to call your local ETFO office if there is no plan or the plan is inadequate. If there is no solution through these channels, the Ministry of Labour has the power to ensure boards create a plan, and workers have the right to [contact them](#) to report such a concern.

I want to return to my extracurricular activities, but am concerned about safety. Can I require additional precautions (e.g., vaccinations, get medical masks, ask for HEPA units)?

ETFO members and students alike get great joy from participating in extracurriculars, but this shouldn't mean sacrificing safety. Any requirements should be set up and

implemented through school administration to ensure that safety, and other protocols are respected.

It is important to note that many extracurricular activities involve activities such as exercise, singing, etc., that increase the aerosols put out into the air. In addition, the province's guidance does not require masking in some of those circumstances. If your board hasn't added a level of protection when participating in extracurriculars, it's something you should speak to your administrator/health and safety representative about.

Can I access Employment Insurance (EI) regular benefits if I am not working due to non-compliance with my board's COVID-19 vaccination policy?

The federal government recently clarified that in most situations, if an employee has quit, lost their job or was placed on an unpaid leave of absence because they did not comply with their employer's COVID-19 vaccination policy, the employee would not be eligible for EI regular benefits. The following factors will be used to determine eligibility:

- If the employer clearly communicated a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy to employees;
- If employees were informed that not complying with the policy would result in loss of employment;
- If applying the policy was reasonable within the workplace context; and
- If employees have a valid reason for not complying with the policy and the employer did not provide an exemption.

Service Canada will contact applicants and employers to evaluate eligibility.

For other information, please check [ETFO's dedicated COVID-19 webpage](#).